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## Hegel's Conception of Immanent Critique: Its Sources, Extent and Limit

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Throughout the twentieth century, many philosophers have implicitly or explicitly assumed that it is possible to criticise a particular philosophical, political or cultural paradigm – be it modernity as such – in the name of a criterion that such a paradigm contains within itself. There is no doubt that this method has been extremely productive. I take it, however, that it also contains an illusory element. In order to shed light on the force and limits of the method that has become known by the name of immanent critique I will, in this chapter, examine Hegel's conception of philosophical critique. To be sure, Hegel never referred to his method as immanent critique. Yet the self-criticism of reason introduced by Kant and further elaborated by Hegel has originated many modes of philosophy that, implicitly or explicitly, presented their method in these terms. At least in modern philosophy, it was Kant who first conceived of critique as a form of reflection that draws its criterion from reason itself, that is, from the form of thought that faces the task of judging its prevailing mode of appearance – Wolffian metaphysics – as inadequate.

As I hope to show in what follows, Hegel is deeply indebted to Kant in this respect. This emerges very clearly from his seminal essay 'On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy in Particular', published in 1802.<sup>1</sup> In my view, the conception of critique that Hegel presents in this essay – on which this chapter will focus – plays a crucial role in more systematic texts such as the *Phenomenology*.

After a brief discussion of this work I will turn to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. It may seem far-fetched to consider this work as testifying to the conception of critical philosophy that the early Hegel took over from Kant. Did not Hegel already in the *Phenomenology*

abandon his early conception of philosophical critique in favour of a closed system? Yet commentators tend to focus on the content of this work rather than on the nature of Hegel's method. By approaching the *Philosophy of Right* from the perspective of this method, by contrast, I hope to show that this work contains a critical strand that is very similar to Hegel's early conception of philosophical critique. Yet I will also suggest that the form of critique enacted in the *Philosophy of Right* no less than Hegel's earlier texts presupposes a criterion that is neither completely immanent nor completely external to the modes of thought that are being criticised. Just as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's early and mature philosophy makes it clear, I will argue, that the criterion from which immanent critique takes its bearings is necessarily tainted with a particularity that it cannot affirm without losing its force. According to this account, immanent critique comes to refer to a form of reflection that is more complicated and more precarious than Kant and Hegel seem to have assumed.

## 1 Kant

The self-criticism of metaphysics enacted in the *Critique of Pure Reason* yields the insight that it should not aspire to knowledge of particular objects, but should be satisfied with disclosing the principles of knowledge contained in the human mind itself.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Hume, Kant does not reject the very idea of a priori principles, but only their inappropriate use in former metaphysics. However, Kant can only present his critique of metaphysics as a self-criticism of reason if the distinction between an appropriate and an inappropriate use of a priori principles relies on a criterion that reason draws from its own depths. Thus, Kant asserts in the *Prolegomena* that he attempted to answer the question as to the possibility of metaphysics by 'inquiring within pure reason itself, and seeking to determine within this source both the elements and the laws of its pure use'.<sup>3</sup> Yet the result of his investigation into the condition that confines the domain of a priori principles to possible objects of experience does not by itself explain why metaphysics has so far produced illusions rather than the naked truth. The following passage from the 'Doctrine of Method' suggests that the source of these illusions inheres in pure reason as well:

But where, as *in* pure reason, an entire system of delusions and deceptions is encountered, ... a wholly specific and indeed negative legislation seems to be required. This legislation, under the name of a

discipline, should draw *on the nature of reason* to establish, as it were, a system of caution and self-examination in view of which no false sophisticated illusion can subsist. (CPR, A711/B739, my emphasis)

According to Kant, pure reason itself exhibits a tangle of dogmatic illusions. In order to discover this tangle, I take him to mean, we only have to consider the history of pure reason, as he does indeed in the very last chapter of the *Critique*. Pure reason actually manifests itself in the history of philosophy, but this outward appearance testifies to the erroneous tendency of reason rather than to its innermost nature. In Kant's view, philosophy can rid itself of the system of errors displayed in the history of philosophy by establishing a legislation that draws on the very nature of reason. This rational self-legislation of reason is based, I take it, on two related elements. First, it relies on a well-defined criterion, namely, the demand that knowledge derive its content from either pure or sensible intuition, that is, proceed not by reason alone (cf. A145–146/B185–186). Second, it assumes the capacity – or force – of reason to obey this demand and, hence, to overcome its erroneous inclinations.

Since pure reason is always tempted to apply its a priori principles to non-sensible objects such as the soul and God, however, it is somehow 'natural' that it should err. As Kant writes, 'what we have to do with here is a natural and unavoidable illusion' (A298/B354). Nevertheless, he sharply distinguishes the 'natural' inclination of reason from its genuine, self-critical nature. For only if this inherent germ of self-criticism is more essential to reason than its inclination to err is it guaranteed that this self-criticism will ultimately acquire the force to eradicate the delusions hitherto produced by pure reason. Thus, Kant clearly regards his *Critique of Pure Reason* to rely on a criterion that is immanent to reason itself. He also suggests, however, that the as yet prevailing tendency of reason to ignore the appeal of this criterion is immanent to reason as well, albeit less essentially so than the criterion itself.

This can only be the case, it seems to me, if the mode of reason that yields the criterion on which reason relies – in its capacity as judge – is conceived as truly universal, and if the mode of reason that is being judged – former metaphysics – is conceived as a particular instance of reason as such. Kant does not explain why the relation between the self-critical core of reason and its tendency to ignore its appeal should be defined in terms of an asymmetrical relation between universality and particularity. The history of post-Kantian philosophy strongly suggests that the relation between these contrary elements is not as

stable as Kant maintains, if only because the criterion that allows us to distinguish between self-critical and self-delusional forms of thought changes over time. Given Hegel's criticism of philosophy, including Kant's, the criterion of true philosophy that Hegel adopts is likely to differ from Kant's. As we will see, however, Hegel no less than Kant considers this criterion to be immanent to pure reason itself.

## 2 Hegel's early essay on philosophical critique

In 1802, Hegel and Schelling published the first issue of their *Critical Journal of Philosophy*. Its opening article, largely written by Hegel, was entitled 'On the Essence of Philosophical Critique as Such and its Relation to the Present State of Philosophy in Particular'. This is the only text that Hegel ever devoted to the concept of critique. He here maintains that modern philosophy, including Kant's, had by no means succeeded in meeting the demands imposed by reason. Contrary to Kant, Hegel explicitly distinguishes between a common form of criticism, based on arbitrary, external criteria, and a truly philosophical form. In his view, genuine critique presupposes a criterion that is independent of those who actually put forward the critique and those against which it is directed. Such a criterion, Hegel notes, can only be found in the 'eternal and unchangeable archetype [*Urbild*] of the matter itself', that is, in this case, in the very idea of philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Hegel clearly endorses Kant's view that the many philosophical systems are but particular guises of one philosophy and, ultimately, of reason as such (EPC 276). He also seems to follow Kant – at least partly – when he argues that the capacity to achieve self-knowledge inheres in reason as such:

Just as there cannot be various reasons [*Vernunftten*], so too a wall cannot be placed between reason and its self-knowledge, a wall, that is, through which this self-knowledge would turn into an appearance essentially different [from reason as such]. For insofar as reason, ... qua self-knowledge, becomes its own object, that is to say, turns into philosophy, it is ... one and the same [as reason as such]. (275)

Hegel here suggests, on the one hand, that reason actually appears in the guise of historical philosophical systems that do not allow it to achieve adequate self-knowledge. On the other hand, he stresses that this appearing reason, so to speak, belongs to reason as such: there is no gap between pure reason – traditionally conceived as God – and the finite modes of philosophy in which reason achieves knowledge of

itself. Pure reason, according to Hegel, occurs nowhere else than in the history of pure thought. Thus, Hegel seems to endorse Kant's view that reason is able to overcome its self-delusions and to achieve insight into itself. Kant, however, sharply distinguishes between the finite mode of reason granted to human beings and the infinite ideal of reason that merely provides the human quest for knowledge with its overarching guiding thread.<sup>5</sup> The metaphor of the wall in the passage just quoted makes it clear that Hegel does not accept the strict distinction between pure reason such as it is enacted in philosophy and the mode of pure reason that, in the guise of God, has always constituted the ultimate object of philosophy. Rather, in philosophy, the subject and object of thought are one and the same (cf. 282).

According to Hegel's account, philosophical critique has the task of interpreting philosophical systems in such a way that the very idea of philosophy that they contain – that is, the idea of reason – is revealed. Hegel opposes this genuine critique to a criticism that merely aims at rejecting the philosophical position at stake. In this case, the criticism is but a 'one-sided decree [*Machtspruch*]' (276). The critic who proceeds in this way does not attempt to bring out the idea of philosophy in the position put forward by his opponent. Consequently, this opponent is likely to perceive the idea of philosophy to which the critic appeals as a 'foreign court of justice' (276), the dictum of which he need not accept. Hegel here clearly refers to the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant famously compares this work to a court of justice, established by reason itself, which has the task of disentangling the justified claims of reason from its groundless pretensions, and this not by mere 'decrees' – *Machtsprüche* – but by appealing to eternal laws inscribed in reason itself.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Hegel endorses Kant's view that reason can and must establish a court of justice that relies on a criterion immanent to reason such as it has actually appeared in the history of philosophy. As we have seen, Hegel refers to this criterion as the very idea of philosophy:

[T]he task of critique consists in elucidating the way and the degree in which [the idea of philosophy] emerges freely and clearly, as well as the range within which [this idea] has been elaborated into a scientific system of philosophy. (277)

Thus, although philosophies that deserve that name all testify to the idea of philosophy, they call for a critique that determines the extent to which this idea has been actualised. According to Hegel, in this case a philosophy cannot object to the judgement that the critic passes on

it, because the critique appeals to a criterion that it contains within itself. He maintains, moreover, that the philosophy under scrutiny not just represents the very idea of philosophy in a one-sided way, but also contains the urge to *actualise* this idea. Philosophical critique therefore need not use force against it, but 'it can keep to the requirement and the need that is expressed, [to] the need which seeks its satisfaction in that which is objective' (277). In other words, the critique merely has to go along with the desire of a particular philosophy to objectify the very idea of philosophy that it necessarily presupposes. Once a philosophy turns out to contain the idea of philosophy, it cannot prevent this idea from breaking through the 'shell that as yet keeps the inner urge from seeing the light of day' (278). The critique need not intervene from without, but can 'refute the limitedness of the shape by means of its own, genuine tendency towards complete objectivity' (277). Rather than claiming that a particular philosophy is wrong, it merely brings out that its finite shape is at odds with the very idea of philosophy that it contains. It thus allows this idea to objectify itself, that is, to annul the limitation of its initial form. This objectivation entails, one might add, that once a philosophy is criticised in this way it can no longer lay claim to the ultimate truth.

Up to this point Hegel has argued that a genuine philosophical critique must assume the very idea of philosophy as its criterion. As was noted above, Kant specifies the criterion of critical philosophy by stating that knowledge cannot be produced by reason alone, but always requires intuition. In his view, this criterion is – just as any other a priori principle – contained in reason as such. It simply had not been discovered by preceding philosophical systems. Evidently, Hegel endorses Kant's view that pure, yet straying reason must be directed to the principle of its self-criticism, a principle that it contains within itself. Yet Hegel does not adopt Kant's particular determination of this criterion. Neither does he spell out how the mere idea of philosophy might constitute a convincing criterion of philosophical critique. Without saying so, he seems to assume that the very idea of philosophy entails two requirements. It entails, first, that philosophy adopt the form of a science, that is, of an encompassing *system*. Since Kant and Fichte proclaimed 'the idea of science and in particular the idea of philosophy as science' (278), Hegel considers so-called philosophies that merely consist of single, unconnected thoughts to have lost all credit. Thus appealing to a criterion established by Kant and Fichte, Hegel implicitly discards the early Romanticists, including Friedrich Schlegel, who at that time deliberately presented their philosophical views in the form of fragments.

The second criterion that guides Hegel's judgement of his contemporaries consists in the requirement that oppositions be reconciled. In this case, Kant's critical philosophy is itself found guilty:

Even the highest manifestation of philosophy in our age has not sufficiently overcome the fixed polarity of inner and outer, of here and yonder. ... In this way the opposition of dualism is given its most abstract expression and philosophy is not led beyond the sphere of our reflective culture. (282)

According to Hegel, philosophical critique should discard all forms of philosophy that remain entangled in dualisms, thus paving the way for a philosophy ruled by reason rather than the understanding (284–285). This conception of the critical task of philosophy is clearly illustrated by Hegel's earliest critique of Kant. In *Faith and Knowledge*, a text also published in 1802, Hegel notes that Kant's question as to the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements expresses the idea of true rationality.<sup>7</sup> He adds, however, that Kant 'did not move beyond the subjective and external meaning of this question and believed he had established that rational cognition is impossible'.<sup>8</sup> For Hegel, a genuine critique of Kant must consist in letting the true meaning of synthetic a priori principles break through the shell of subjectivity that so far concealed their true rationality, thus liberating their true principle from their inadequate mode of appearance.

### 3 The *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Although Hegel in his mature work seldom uses the term 'critique', I hold that throughout his life he remained faithful to the conception of critique delineated in his early essay as well as to the criteria that guide this critique.<sup>9</sup> Hegel never gave up the requirement that philosophy proceed by grasping the very idea of philosophy – or reason – that any appearing mode of philosophy contains. He no less gave up the requirement that philosophy resolve ontological oppositions and develop into a system. This is very well illustrated by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which Hegel extends his philosophical method to the one-sided scientific, cultural and philosophical paradigms that he took to have defined European culture. Thus, he claims in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* that the refutation of a philosophical position should be 'derived and developed from the principle itself, not accomplished by counter-assertions and random thoughts from outside'.<sup>10</sup> This principle, Hegel suggests, ultimately consists in the idea of scientific philosophy (Phen 52),

an idea that is contained even in a primitive mode of thought such as sense certainty. Yet he does not proceed by confronting sense certainty with its ultimate principle in an external manner, for in that case it would not necessarily recognise the criterion put forward by the critic as its own and, hence, would not be forced to abandon its initial conception of the principle of cognition (52).

So Hegel seems to agree with Kant that a mode of thought that claims to be in the possession of true knowledge must *itself* discover the criterion that makes it possible to evaluate this claim. Yet whereas the *Critique of Pure Reason* merely employs this idea to criticise pure reason as a whole, Hegel held that *each and every single mode of thought* should be considered in this way:

Consciousness gives itself its own criterion, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself. ... Thus, what consciousness from within itself declares to be the in itself or the true provides us with the standard which consciousness itself sets up to measure its knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

On Hegel's account, the philosopher merely has to 'observe' how a particular mode of thought attempts to liberate itself from its initial presupposition (54). This occurs when the latter somehow becomes aware of the contradiction between, on the one hand, its ultimate principle and, on the other hand, its actual, limited comprehension of this principle. Due to this methodical principle, 'the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself' (51).

What Hegel does not really make explicit, however, is that he from the outset – and behind the back of the modes of consciousness under discussion – conceives of every particular criterion that emerges in the course of the *Phenomenology* as a limited guise of reason as such, that is, of the ultimate principle of speculative science.<sup>12</sup> Since Hegel has from the outset determined reason as the capacity to overcome fixed oppositions and to develop into a system, absolute knowing itself can ultimately emerge as the most perfect actualisation of scientific philosophy. This means that Hegel in the *Phenomenology* considers philosophical critique no longer merely to bring out the limits of existing philosophical systems, but rather as the very means that allows philosophy to take 'the secure course of a science', to use Kant's words (cf. CPR, Bvii). Whereas Kant regarded the critique enacted in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a preliminary activity different from the subsequent task of producing a system (A11–12/B25–26), Hegel conceives of the

self-critique enacted by any particular mode of thought as an essential element of this very production. Does this imply that the method that Hegel employs in his systematic works no longer possesses critical force at all? Or can we even find traces of a truly philosophical critique in a work such as the *Philosophy of Right*? In the following section I will argue that this is indeed the case. I also turn to this text, however, to illustrate the illusory element of Hegel's conception of critique.

#### 4 The *Philosophy of Right*

The stated aim of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, published in 1821, is 'to comprehend and portray the state as something that is inherently rational'.<sup>13</sup> Hegel conceives of the state as a mode of reason – or, in his terminology, of the concept – because it subordinates the apparent independence of a variety of elements to their unifying principle. The particular way in which the state achieves this unity is by producing a number of laws and institutions that together make it possible for a people to sustain itself and flourish.<sup>14</sup> Since the principles on which the state is based allow a people to preclude barbarism and arbitrariness (PR § 360), the state is the element in which 'freedom enters into its highest right' (§ 258, cf. § 4).

The *Philosophy of Right* is confined to an analysis of the *idea* of the state, that is to say, of the totality of determinations that are contained in its very concept. Principles such as property rights and institutions such as marriage or the corporation are examples of such determinations. Accordingly, Hegel abstracts from the historical development of various state forms (§ 258, rem.). In his view, however, each of these actual shapes manifests the idea of the state as such, even if its outward form makes it sometimes very difficult to perceive its rational core:

For since the rational, which is synonymous with the idea, becomes actual by entering into external existence, it emerges in an infinite wealth of forms, appearances, and shapes, and surrounds its core with a brightly coloured covering in which consciousness at first resides, but which only the concept can penetrate in order to find the inner pulse, and detect its continued beat even within the external shapes. (PR 20–21)

This passage echoes Hegel's early account of philosophical critique. Just as philosophy should criticise a particular philosophical system by bringing out the very idea of scientific philosophy that it contains, so

should it consider any actual state – even a tyranny – to contain the very idea of a rational state. Yet the *Philosophy of Right* does not explicitly criticise actual states by pointing out that their self-comprehension is at odds with the idea of the state that they unknowingly contain. It does not have to do so, because history itself has already taken care of this self-criticism of political reason, a process of which the essential moments are reconstructed in Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history. Neither does Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right* intend to criticise the Prussian state of his time. He asserts, at least, that comprehending the idea of the state means that one refrains from 'the obligation to construct a state as it ought to be' (PR 21). If the Prussian state exhibits the inner pulse of rationality more clearly than previous state forms, then this is allegedly due to the self-criticism of political reason enacted in the element of world history itself.

Given these considerations, what could be the target of the criticism enacted in the *Philosophy of Right*, if any? According to Hegel's own understanding the critical strand of this work is primarily directed against the various ways in which philosophy has so far *conceived* of the state:

[S]uch instruction as [this treatise] may contain cannot be aimed at instructing the state on how it ought to be, but rather at showing how the state, as the ethical universe, should be *cognised*. (PR 21, my emphasis)

Rather than reconciling itself lukewarmly with a state that is far from perfect, philosophy, he adds, seeks a 'warmer peace' with reality, a peace that in his view cognition alone can provide (PR 23). This feature of the *Philosophy of Right* emerges most clearly from its first two parts, which are devoted to abstract right and morality. Hegel basically argues that these determinations manifest the free will and, as such, belong to the idea of the state. It follows from the very idea of the state, in other words, that a state both protect the rights of its citizens by means of laws and allow them to follow their conscience. By presenting abstract right and morality as subordinate moments of the idea of the state, however, Hegel by the same token puts into perspective political theories that adopt either abstract right or morality as their absolute principle. Due to the logic that undergirds the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel notes, these abstract moments:

become posited in their negativity, according to which they one-sidedly constitute themselves as independent totalities, both refusing

to accept what *in itself* belongs to them, ... and cancel themselves out so as to reduce themselves to moments, to moments of the concept which becomes manifest as their unity and has attained reality through this very positing of its moments, so that it now exists as idea.<sup>15</sup>

Pointing out that each moment contains its contrary within itself, Hegel reduces abstract right and morality to moments of the idea of the state. He thus confronts theoretical conceptions of the state with a principle – the idea of the state as such – that is at odds with the way in which they themselves conceived of their principle. In this way, these conceptions are reduced to moments as well.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Hegel argues that the sphere of ethical life cannot be grasped by drawing either on an abstract conception of the state or on the principle of individual interests, because ethical life is nothing but the organic totality of the family, civil society and the state (cf. § 258, rem.). Considered in this way, Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right* does not abandon his earlier conception of philosophical criticism, but employs it to elaborate a systematic account of the various determinations that he takes to be contained in the very idea of the state.

According to the logic that guides Hegel's account, the principle of particularity contains its contrary – the principle of universality – within itself and for that reason cannot but reduce itself to a moment of concrete universality (§ 186). As I see it, Hegel's references to this development pertain primarily to the method that allows him to elaborate the various determinations of the idea of the state in a systematic way. In line with the *Phenomenology*, Hegel asserts that this elaboration is merely a matter of observing how limited modes of thought – in this case, determinations of the idea of the state – are forced to criticise and overcome their limited self-conception:

This development of the idea ... is something which thought, since it is subjective, merely observes, without for its part adding anything extra to it. To consider something rationally means not to bring reason to bear on the object from outside in order to work upon it, for the object is rational for itself; it is the spirit in its freedom, the highest apex of self-conscious reason, which here gives itself actuality and engenders itself as an existing world; and the sole business of science is to make conscious the work that is accomplished by the reason of the thing itself. (§ 31, rem.)

However, Hegel's 'observation' of the way in which the various determinations of the idea of the state initially present themselves as absolute

and are subsequently reduced to moments is based on the presupposition that the idea of the state relates to the latter as the universal to its particular instantiations. Otherwise the idea of the state would not be able to function as the 'very soul' of these determinations, that is, as the principle that forces them *from within* to give up their purported independence (§ 31, rem.). Thus, abstract right, morality and the various determinations of ethical life can only be considered to accomplish an immanent critique of their initial self-comprehension if the idea of the state has from the very outset been posited as a criterion that each of these particular determinations contains within itself. The philosophical critic can only present himself as an impartial observer, in other words, by positing a certain conception of the idea of the state as the truly universal principle of the determinations that he aims to criticise. Only thus can he ensure that the latter eventually reduce themselves to mere moments of this very idea.

Once again, all this is in agreement with Hegel's early conception of philosophical criticism as well as with Kant's distinction between the criterion of a priori cognition contained in reason itself and the inclination to err that it likewise contains. But does the systematic force that Hegel derives from this method allow him to assume that actual societies are likewise particular instances of an idea that, in the end, forces them to overcome their inherent inclination to err? As was mentioned above, Hegel does not regard it as the task of the *Philosophy of Right* to take issue with either the Prussian state of his time or the modern state as such. Yet some passages in this work seem to point in a different direction. Thus, in the course of his account of civil society, Hegel addresses what he saw as the disruptive effects of capitalism, an element of modernity that he took to ensue from an unbounded form of the principle of particularity.<sup>17</sup> Insofar as civil society is defined by this principle, Hegel writes, it 'affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both' (§ 185) and is unlikely to be able 'to control the excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble' (§ 245). Even though Hegel was well aware of the difference between philosophy and actual world history, he seems to assume that world history is, in the end, subjected to the same negativity as the determinations that constitute the content of, for example, the *Philosophy of Right*. Thus, when Hegel notes in an addition to the section about the corrupting effects of capitalism that the totality must be 'endowed with sufficient strength to bring particularity into harmony with the ethical unity' (§ 185, add.) he has something else in mind than the nature of his philosophical method.

Just as Kant, Hegel distinguishes between reason qua universal principle and its particular instantiations in such a way that the former is endowed with the force to overcome the tendency of the latter to persist in self-delusion. Hegel, in other words, cannot grant the same force to the destructive tendencies that seem to inhere in modern societies – such as the tendency of capitalism to increase poverty and corruption – as to the alleged capacity of the state to control such destructive effects. This means, as I have suggested throughout this chapter, that Hegel, like Kant, relies on a conception of reason that itself does not result from impartial observation, but rather from a deliberate positing of a particular criterion as universal and, hence, as immanent to forms of reason that from that moment onward can be put to trial, found guilty or presented as harmless. This is, in my view, what the *Critique of Pure Reason* does with regard to former metaphysics and what the *Philosophy of Right* does with regard to capitalism.

In both cases, Kant and Hegel bring into play criteria that allow them to interpret particular forms of reason as illusory, counterproductive or self-undermining. Yet by presenting these very criteria as universal, as they no doubt had to, they reproduce a conception of the relation between universality and particularity that denies the latter the capacity to resist its reduction to a moment of the former. They ignored, that is, that any criterion necessarily emerges from a particular historical constellation and *for that reason* is not necessarily more powerful than the modes of reason that it is supposed to confront from within with their proper limits. Since a criterion can only be regarded as immanent to the modes of thought to be criticised if it is posited as universal, or essential, immanent critique necessarily possesses an illusionary element. It is an element that post-Kantian critical philosophy inherited from the very distinction between universality and particularity established by Plato and his predecessors. Whereas Hegel was able to overcome the dualism implied by this distinction, he was unable to acknowledge that in many cases – and perhaps preeminently in modern societies – the tendency of a particular determination to undermine its alleged principle from within is *as essential* as the tendency of this alleged principle to reduce its particular determinations to harmless moments.<sup>18</sup>

To be sure, a critic of Hegel such as Marx already pointed out that Hegel's conception of the state was based on bourgeois rather than universal values. But Marx's own critique of both Hegel and bourgeois society ultimately no less owes its force to a criterion that is presented as universal, be it humanity, justice or the overcoming of self-alienation. Like Hegel, Marx had to define – albeit implicitly – the relation between

his ultimate criterion and the target of his criticism in terms of the asymmetrical relation between universality and particularity. Otherwise his critical philosophy would unavoidably lose its force and – just as capitalism – become its own gravedigger. For how can one fight injustice if not in the name of freedom, democracy, equality or universal human rights? And how could one today legitimise wars if not in the name of values presented as immanent to humanity as such?

## 5 The future of immanent critique

Hegel, we have seen, criticised Kant's philosophy in the name of criteria no less drawn from the depths of reason than the criterion that Kant used to criticise Wolffian metaphysics. Yet in order to reduce Kant's philosophy to a one-sided instance of scientific philosophy, he had to bring into play a set of criteria different from Kant's own. Similarly, from Feuerbach onwards, post-Hegelian philosophers called into question the particular criteria embraced by Hegel himself.<sup>19</sup> Yet the various modes of philosophy that took their bearings from this form of critique, I have argued, also inherited the tension contained in its very notion. On the one hand, immanent critique can only call into question particular paradigms by appealing to particular criteria. Since, on the other hand, such particular criteria are likely to be perceived as external to the paradigm under critique, critical philosophy tends to present its criteria as universal, that is, to dissimulate the historical and contingent nature of criteria such as reason, the idea of philosophy, freedom, equality, justice or human rights.

It has not been the aim of this chapter simply to expose all such criteria as particular and, hence, to argue that their use in forms of critique that purport to be immanent is problematic. This would come down to a sceptical position that I do not hold to be very fruitful. I have rather tried to expose the historical roots of a dilemma that seems to haunt contemporary forms of critical philosophy no less than Kant's and Hegel's. For either philosophy derives its critical force from a more or less straightforward appeal to criteria presented as universal, or it threatens to lose this force by taking into account the very production – and hence precariousness – of the criteria that it embraces. Whereas Habermas and Rawls can be taken to represent the former horn of the dilemma, I regard Adorno, Foucault and Derrida as representatives of the latter horn.<sup>20</sup> Each in their own way, they can be said to illustrate that critical philosophy cannot at once adequately comprehend the world and set about to change it. For providing individuals or

communities with forceful critical tools requires of philosophy that it posit an asymmetrical distinction between universality and particularity and endows the former with the force to reduce the latter to one of its proper moments. Turning against the optimism that Kant and Hegel shared with Enlightenment culture, Adorno, Foucault, Derrida and others have unmasked this optimism as illusionary. Their attempts to do justice to the complexity of cultural and political processes are therefore less likely to issue the tools necessary to criticise these processes.

By pointing to this dilemma I have not wished to suggest that the method of immanent critique must be abandoned altogether, nor that the very distinction between immanent and external criticism has become untenable. Yet if contemporary critical philosophy is to renew itself, it should perhaps turn its critical gaze not only to forms of life, power or thought that it perceives as questionable, but also to the very concept of immanent critique that it has generally taken for granted. Rather than presenting themselves as impartial observers, critics should affirm their implication in the production of the criteria that are used to confront a certain paradigm with its limits.<sup>21</sup> According to this account, their task would consist in revealing how a particular paradigm – be it modernity as a whole – tends to conceive of its own particular principles as universal criteria, and by that very gesture – the essence of ideology – tends to reduce competing paradigms to particular instances of itself that can be brought to trial and declared harmless or obsolete. Such a reflexive form of critical philosophy would no longer straightforwardly call into question forms of alienation, ideology or exploitation in the name of humanity, freedom, self-determination or democracy. In that respect, it would indeed become the gravedigger of a certain tradition of critical philosophy. Yet future guises of critical philosophy – if there will be any – may well depend on their capacity to affirm the necessarily self-delusional moment contained not only in the paradigms that they oppose, but also in the very idea of immanent critique itself. While such an illusion ‘can be prevented from deceiving’, as Kant notes with regard to the ideas of pure reason, it ‘is nevertheless indispensably necessary if besides the objects before our eyes we want to see at once those that, far removed from the latter, are hidden behind our backs’.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

Earlier versions of parts of this chapter have been published in ‘Kant, Hegel, en het begrip “immanente kritiek” in de moderne filosofie’, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 71/3, 2009, 475–498 (in Dutch) and in ‘Kant and Hegel: Critical Reflections on

Reason', in G. Bertram, D. Lauer, C. Ladou and R. Celikates (eds), *Expérience et réflexivité. Perspectives au-delà de l'empirisme et de l'idéalisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011), 143–155. The argument of the chapter as a whole draws on the theoretical framework presented in my *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

1. G. W. F. Hegel, 'On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy in Particular', translated by H. S. Harris, in G. di Giovanni (ed.), *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (Indianapolis, IN and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 275–291 (hereafter EPC).
2. 'The Transcendental Analytic accordingly has this important result: That the understanding can never accomplish a priori anything more than to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general, and, since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility, within which alone objects are given to us,' I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A247–248/B303 (hereafter CPR).
3. I. Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, translated by G. Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 274.
4. EPC 275. Kant uses the same term (*Urbild*) with regard to the idea of philosophy that allows us to judge the existing forms of philosophy (CPR, A838/B867). He likewise uses the term with regard to the ideal of pure reason, that is, the idea of a highest being that makes it possible for us to represent all things as elements of a single totality (A578/B606).
5. CPR, A644–645/B672–673.
6. CPR, Axi–xii, cf. A740/B768, A751/B779.
7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, translated by W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977), 69 (hereafter FK).
8. FK 69. Hegel criticises Kant for conceiving of this transcendental synthesis 'only as a product and in its appearance as judgment' and not as the essence of reason itself (FK 81).
9. In this respect I do not agree with Houlgate's claim that Hegel's conception of critique in the *Phenomenology* differs substantially from the one put forward in his 1802 essay. See S. Houlgate, 'Glauben und Wissen: Hegels immanente Kritik der Kantischen Philosophie oder die (illegitime) "Ahnung eines Besseren"?' in A. Arndt, K. Bal and H. Ottmann (eds), *Glauben und Wissen, Dritter Teil, [Hegel-Jahrbuch 2005]* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 152–158.
10. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 13 (hereafter Phen). In the *Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), Hegel advances the same position. While Spinoza's philosophy must be considered as true, essential and necessary, Hegel here notes, it unduly regarded itself as the highest possible position (580). A refutation of this latter claim 'must not proceed from assumptions which lie outside the system in question and do not accord with it. The system itself, however, need not recognise these assumptions. ... The genuine refutation must penetrate the power of its opponent and adopt a position within reach of its strength; the matter

at hand is not served by attacking him from without and by being proved right where he is not' (580–581). This does not entail, of course, that Hegel himself has always met his own criteria of philosophical criticism. Even his explicit criticism of Kant is rather less convincing, I hold, than his actual transformation of Kant's basic insights.

11. Phen 53. Cf.: 'The forms of thought are to be considered in and for themselves; ... they examine themselves, they are to determine their own limit by themselves and lay bare their own defects' (G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, translated by W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), § 41, add. 1).
12. 'But it is just this necessity itself ... which proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness' (Phen 68/56).
13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21 (hereafter PR).
14. PR § 258, rem., cf. § 270.
15. PR § 141, add., translation modified.
16. In this regard I disagree with Honneth's account of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel's Social Thought*, translated by L. Löb (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010). As I see it, Hegel's analysis of abstract right examines one-sided theories rather than pathological attitudes attributable to individual citizens or groups, as Honneth claims (cf. 49, 59, 67).
17. Cf. PR, § 189. See on this issue my *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative*, Ch. 9. See also S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 147–154; and T. E. Wartenberg, 'Poverty and Class Structure in Hegel's Theory of Civil Society', in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 8, 1981, 169–182. I agree with Wartenberg that Hegel's philosophy, since it has no answer to the problem of poverty and oppression inherent in the modern state, here begins to reveal its limits (255). In his view, Hegel's tripartite conception of civil society is at odds with his implicit acknowledgment of the emerging opposition between owners and workers, and that he could not incorporate this latter development into his philosophical account of the modern state.
18. I consider this insight to be Derrida's most important contribution to contemporary continental philosophy. See for an account of the relation between Hegel and Derrida that stresses this point my 'Différance as Negativity: The Hegelian Remains of Derrida's Philosophy', in S. Houlgate and M. Baur (eds), *Blackwell Companion to Hegel*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 594–610.
19. See on the history of this concept, for example, A. Buchwalter, 'Hegel, Marx, and the Concept of Immanent Critique', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29/2, 1991, 253–279. According to Buchwalter, Marx considered Hegel's philosophical critique to be 'infused with transcendent considerations' (260), because he allegedly drew on the fundamental nature of things rather than on 'existing principles of evaluation' (262, cf. 263, 274). Buchwalter argues, however, that any form of immanent critique, including Marx's, presupposes such a transcendent dimension (261–262, 268). I agree with his view that universalism and contextualism constitute mutually dependent determinations rather than elements of a clear-cut opposition (279).
20. P. Turetzky, 'Immanent Critique', *Philosophy Today*, 33/2, 1989, 144–158 offers an interesting comparison of what he regards as the formal and

material forms of immanent critique elaborated by Habermas and Foucault, respectively. While Turetzky's defence of Foucault is convincing, I disagree more than he does with Habermas's view that universal criteria can be derived from the very nature of rational argumentation. As I see it, efforts to dominate at the cost of alternative viewpoints are no less essential to the conditions of actual discourse.

21. N. Kompridis, 'Disclosing Possibility: The Past and Future of Critical Theory', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 13/3, 2005, 325–351, similarly endorses a reflective form of critique, a form that no longer takes its bearings from the idea of truth, or universal criteria, or proceduralism (337). Contemporary, pluralist societies, Kompridis argues, call for a form of 'intimate critique' that implicates both the critic and its object in an open-ended process of learning (337). Whereas I agree with the critical element of Kompridis's account, I do not quite share his apparent optimism as to the capacity of the form of critique that he sketches to facilitate 'the renewal of utopian energies, the regeneration of confidence and hope' (348, cf. 340). This optimism itself, I take Derrida to have shown, is too deeply entangled with the Enlightenment conception of critique to go unscathed by a criticism of the latter.
22. CPR, A645/B673.